

## Catherine Heard: *Imagining Phantoms*

Linda Steer

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## Catherine Heard: *Imagining Phantoms*

Linda Steer

**ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON  
JUNE 17 –  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2016**

In a darkened room, undulating bodies of flying swallows make their way through the density that is the animated image of the inside of a sculpture's brain. Other figures flicker across the screen: butterflies, a rabbit, card players, a falling woman, windmills, various flora and fauna, poppies, the letter "M," a king, finally ending with an embroidered flower. This work, called *Myrllen: A Portrait*, 2016, is beautiful, haunting and thought-provoking. It is one of three works in Catherine Heard's new body of work, on view at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Heard's process for the body of work in this show is fascinating. All three works integrate sculpture with video in innovative ways. And, all three explore the artistic potential of medical imaging. The exhibition is the result of collaboration between Heard and Dr. Julian Dobranowski, who is a professor and Director of the Centre of Radiological Anatomy at McMaster University. St Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton loaned their equipment.

Heard developed a new process to create the work for the exhibition in which she sculpted human forms out of various materials, scanned the sculptures in a CT machine and created a video from the results. In CT scans, which create black and white images, the densest material appears white and the least dense, black. After several years of experiments and trial and error with materials such as clay, papier mâché, wax and porcelain, Heard learned that the materials she wanted to use in the sculptures (plant matter, bits of fabric and lace, embroidery) became most visible in the scans when coated with barium. After scanning the sculptures, she used OsiriX, software used to view medical images, to create the videos that animate them. Two of the three works in this exhibition use this method, whereas a third, entitled *Self Portrait: 2014-05-01, 10:48 am*, is a straight video output from OsiriX that combines the images created by an fMRI scan of a her own body into a moving 3-D image. It is presented inside a handsomely made cabinet and is viewed through a peephole-like lens.

Based on a medical image from the 19th-century, *Phantom*, 2016, is a  $\frac{3}{4}$  scale sculpture of a male human body. Heard created the figure from the inside out: it is built up from the bones with layers of leaves and other plant material from her garden that have been coated with wax and barium. The lungs are delicate and meticulously formed with fabric dipped in beeswax, which was then wrapped around barium-coated seedpods that look like capers. The small figure is installed hanging on the black wall in a darkened room, with the to-scale video projected from the ceiling onto a platform in front of it. The video shows the sculpture from front to back and then in reverse, slicing it into layers of images that are recombined to create the illusion of



movement. That illusion is most powerful in the images of the lungs, when we are taken back and forth through them, like a flipbook. The figure appears to be breathing. The contrast, here, between the dark, inanimate object on the wall, and the bright, moving representation of it at our feet, is profoundly beautiful and haunting. The title *Phantom* is apt given that this is the name for models of the human body used in medical training. But this "phantom" is more than that. It is a sculptural phantom; the eerily undulating image shows us the interior of a sculpture that is uncannily human. The conceptual layers of the work are as rich as its physical layers.

The conceptual layers of *Myrllen: A Portrait* take the viewer deep into the imagined psyche of a sculpted form. Here, the video progresses through the layers of a larger-than-life human female head that is a portrait of a historical figure. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, Myrllen was an American woman who was institutionalized in the late 1940s after attempting to murder her husband. While there, she embroidered extensively, even making her own thread from scraps

of cloth. It is appropriate, then, that Heard used several hundred layers of embroidered cloth and lace, another material connected with women's handiwork, to construct the head.

Looking at anonymous, publicly available brain scans used for teaching as source material, Heard fashioned the individual layers of the head as medical images. As in *Phantom*, the layers were coated with varying levels of barium to impact their visibility in the CT scan. Most of the cloth was found or donated, but a few pieces, all embroidered with the same image, were created explicitly for the project. Heard copied the image of the falling woman, a figure reminiscent of Tarot cards and of photographs from 9/11, from one of Myrlllen's embroidered works.

In opposition to *Phantom*, the sculpted form in *Myrlllen: A Portrait* lies on its side on a pedestal and the video is projected on the wall. The animated projection of the CT scan is hypnotic and compelling as we see what is inside the head of "Myrlllen." While the work asks us to consider the contrast between the constructed categories of normal and abnormal, it also speaks to the mysteries of the unconscious mind. The invisible mind becomes visible through the projection of images, which, rather than show us the physical makeup of the brain, instead seems to show us what the sculpture of Myrlllen's head imagines: birds and butterflies, embroidered windmills, lace fragments, all the detritus of napkins, tablecloths and aprons, discarded from the kitchens of numerous women's lives. Do we see, then, Myrlllen's imagination or something greater than that? Heard's work is profound and beautiful because it taps in to something larger, something outside itself, something like a broader cultural unconscious and all our forgotten memories.

Linda Steer is associate professor of Art History/ Visual Culture at Brock University. She writes about avant-garde art, photography and contemporary art. Her monograph *Appropriated Photographs in French Surrealist Periodicals: 1924-1939* was recently published by Routledge Press.

## Yann Pocreau : *Patrimoines*

Anne-Marie Dubois

**GALERIE DE L'UQAM  
MONTRÉAL  
30 AOÛT –  
8 OCTOBRE 2016**

Exposition inaugurale de la rentrée à la Galerie de l'UQAM, *Patrimoines* de Yann Pocreau réitère une réflexion intéressée à la fois par l'immanence de la lumière mise en scène à travers les lieux et les architectures qu'elle habite, mais également à sa potentialité narrative. Reconnu pour la qualité et la pertinence de son travail photographique, Pocreau propose ici des œuvres installatives qui rendent justice à une production artistique informée par les enjeux sociaux et esthétiques de sa contemporanéité.

Réalisée dans le cadre du programme de résidence de la Galerie de l'UQAM, *Patrimoines* s'insère dans une démarche beaucoup plus large, soit celle d'une collaboration entre l'artiste et le nouveau Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM) dans le contexte du programme d'intégration des arts à l'architecture. Invité à témoigner de la construction du nouvel édifice – , et ce, depuis deux ans déjà – , Pocreau s'est saisi de l'occasion afin de proposer une « œuvre processuelle » qui prendra la forme d'un recueil en 2020. À la fois matrice, motif et contexte, la construction du CHUM est donc le prétexte d'une réflexion sur notre patrimoine architectural et des rapports humains qui lui sont sous-jacents. *Patrimoines* s'inscrit donc à la fois en amont et en aval de ce projet collaboratif de longue haleine, et met en exergue la démolition de l'Hôpital Saint-Luc.

Emblématiques du travail de Pocreau, cinq photographies donnent le ton à l'exposition, indexant, en début de parcours, le motif central de *Patrimoines*, soit le défunt centre hospitalier. À travers la série *CHUM/ construction 1, 2, 3 4 et 5*, l'artiste s'attache ainsi à esthétiser les structures géométriques créées par l'amoncellement de débris, les ruines du bâtiment désormais disparu étant le prétexte à des paysages d'une beauté déroutante. Une signature esthétique chère à l'artiste que l'on retrouve ici avec une certaine appréhension, ne sachant de qui, du *memento mori* ou du sublime, elle s'inspire le plus.

Œuvre hybride à cheval entre l'album de famille et le document d'archives, *Mémoires* alimente cette ambiguïté, les images convoquées brochant le fil d'une mémoire schizoéphrène que l'on ne saurait attribuer à Pocreau ou au centre hospitalier lui-même. S'y succèdent ainsi des clichés parfois raturés de la mère de l'artiste – alors elle-même résidente de Saint-Luc – et d'autres, anonymes, de divers objets et artefacts dessinant le visage de ces lieux disparus. L'archaïsme du mécanisme de projection de diapositives, posé sur un vieux bureau de médecin, contribue à exacerber cette chronique de l'ordinaire dont l'effet paradoxal est inéluctablement d'en accroître la charge affective.